

WITNESS STATEMENT OF MATT DRISCOLL TO THE LEVESON INQUIRY

1. I was employed by the News of the World in 1997 following a 12 year journalistic career which saw me work for local newspapers and TV before being employed by Express Newspapers as a Sports Writer. My position was to cover football in the North of England and I was promoted several times leading to my eventual return to the paper's London base.
2. My initial experiences within the sports department was mostly of high professionalism and a passionate regard for in-depth investigative journalism. I continually travelled round the world to work on stories and the practice of 'good old fashioned reporting' on the paper seemed to be alive and kicking. I was encouraged to spend a great deal of my time socialising with sporting personalities with a great deal of personal contact and entertaining directed at the figures I was supposed to interview and write about.
3. However, there were several incidents which did concern me during my decade with the News of the World which I now realise may have been a reflection of possible darker aspects of the paper's private practices. I had been working on information that [redacted] might have been checked over for a possible worrying illness. After intense work on the story I found myself stalled by a raft of denials.
4. It was then I had my first realisation of what is now referred to as 'the darker arts' of the paper's investigations when I was confronted with the whole personal medical records of [redacted] which had been obtained by the Sports Desk via the news division. I remember my jaw dropping in utter shock!
5. There were other times after that when I also witnessed the use of what is now referred to as 'blagging' - that is when a specialist actor would be employed to pretend to be someone else in order to obtain private information. The general attitude to this in the newsroom was one of mirth.
6. At the time I felt very uneasy about such methods. However, I knew I could not bring up my concerns on the editorial floor for fear of being seen as a trouble maker. Any writer who questioned the morality of these methods used by executives would have been a marked man.
7. Having later talked privately to others who felt uncomfortable with some of the methods adopted by certain sections of the editorial floor, it became clear to me that these methods were not new and had been rife during most of my years on the paper. In fact, I came to realise that, with regard to the Features, Showbiz and News departments the obtaining of medical records was regarded as a mundane action.
8. To my surprise, after speaking to colleagues about the [redacted] medical records, I was told that all three departments would, at certain times, often pass on information they felt might be useful to the Sports Editor. Information that was often used when the Sports Desk needed to substantiate a story or needed extra help when normal routes of inquiry had failed.
9. In fairness to those working on the News and Features departments it seemed to me that there was a great deal of pressure placed on good journalists on the News of the World. But whenever the subject came up in brief conversations I was told that they were only doing what journalists on rival papers were doing every day.

10. It seemed that any method that could stand a story up was fair game. It was also clear that there was massive pressure from the top to break stories. It was largely accepted that this pressure came from the proprietors and editors on the basis that big, sensational stories sells papers and therefore makes more money.
11. Also there was intense pressure on the legal department. All papers have a great fear of being successfully sued as, in certain cases, it can be very costly if the case is lost. And contrary to what the public might think, papers absolutely hate to get a big story wrong - hence the pressure to use whatever means to get it right and grab the big exclusive. With the gradual demise of readerships comes cost cutting which intensifies the pressure on investigative reporters fear of being being sued. So with those pressures come stronger emphasis on the legal departments to make sure all sources are checked and fully substantiated.
12. I feel sure that the introduction of hacking, obtaining medical records and all of the rest of the so-called dark arts were at least partially based on satisfying lawyers that the crux of stories were sound. In my experience, if I was putting together a big story that might put the paper at risk of legal action further down the line, the Sports Editor, Editor and legal department would want to know, in great detail, where all the information had come from and exactly who the sources were.
13. During my time in newspapers I was never once successfully sued - which is not a common boast for many tabloid writers. I felt this was the result of one-on-one interviews and the use of basic journalistic values to avoid risky stories if needed. Even when useful information had been handed to me I always checked it.
14. In the quest for the big headlines I was dismayed that the News of the World was starting to use more and more material lifted from the internet or foreign magazines and often embellished.
15. There were times when I would return from interviewing a prominent Premier League football manager only to find the paper using material from a months old interview in order to obtain a better headline. I did not consider this to be true journalism or true live reporting - and I often voiced my disapproval.
16. But all of this was simply a reflection of the growing pressures being placed on Editors to try and combat the decline of sales. There was an ever growing trend to get the big story or headline by any means possible.
17. Just as any newspaper can make a bad journalist look good with the way he is projected or the stories he is given to work on, they can also make a good journalist look bad.
18. I found this out for myself when I suddenly became on the receiving end of unfair editorial and executive treatment after a series of fall outs with my chain of command concerning false allegations made about me by a football club unhappy that I was writing stories they would have preferred to have kept under wraps.
19. At one point I found myself being blamed for failing to respond to a written complaint from a football club when the blame for inaction on the dispute had lied squarely on the shoulders my Sports Editor. Having given him the facts with which to counter the complaint he had done nothing. And, rather than face the wrath of editor Andy Coulson, he pointed the finger at me.

20. As a result I had to face a disciplinary hearing.....chaired by the Sports Editor who had caused the problem.
21. Eventually, I received a written warning for something I had not been responsible for.
22. Angry at being railroaded in such a crude way I wrote the paper's then Editor Andy Coulson. Explaining the situation I said that, though innocent, I would accept the warning if it would result in greater harmony in the future. His short reply was: 'I would have sacked you.'
23. And this was at the very time when the Sports Editor had promised to promote me to Chief Sports Writer. But his eager willingness to make sure that I took the blame for his incompetence was a glaring indication that my face did not suddenly fit.
24. I had already seen colleagues previously treated in this way when they fell suddenly out of favour. Though I decided to knuckle down and simply try and work my way through all this by providing quality articles they still quite cynically found ways to try and trip me up.
25. The editor's reply to my letter was the starting gun for an open campaign against me - as was later proved in my Employment Tribunal case against the paper.
26. The relentless effort to pressurise me day by day in order to bully me out of the paper eventually caused me to fall ill from mental stress.
27. Despite written support from an eminent consultant helping me with my illness I was eventually sacked by the News of the World on grounds of lack of capability after a long term absence for mental stress.
28. But the intimidation did not stop when I left the paper.
29. Despite the pleas for understanding from my family doctor and the psychiatric consultant they chose not to settle out of court or, more simply, to include me in upcoming redundancies. Ignoring the medical warnings as to the possible effect on my health, they chose to fight me for two years.
30. They insisted, despite my health situation, on forcing me into a two week Tribunal.
31. Having hired one of the country's top employment barristers they called no less than 10 witnesses during the two week tribunal and, even the shame of Andy Coulson being admonished by the judge for 'presiding over a regime of bullying at the News of the World'... they remained relentless toward me.
32. Three times they appealed against my successful claim for unfair dismissal. Though each appeal was thrown out, the ordeal cost me my health, my career, my life savings and... later... £150,000 in legal costs.
33. Having now seen the eventual destruction of one of the world's oldest national newspapers my strong feeling is that the cold blooded hostility I suffered was probably the first ominous sign of unfettered arrogance and cold vindictiveness that had been allowed to mature within the walls of Wapping.

34. They were dishing out their idea of justice within the paper and in the pages of the paper regardless of whether it was fair or even true. As a result of this aggressive and grotesque arrogance, those in charge - the proprietors and the editors - came to believe that they could do and say whatever they wanted and remain untouchable.
35. In my years at News International, I came to believe - along with other journalists - that the newspaper group were indeed confident that they were untouchable because they were sure they had the government and police fighting their corner. Thus, they felt they were almost beyond the reach of the law.
36. These powerful contacts were the reason why some on the News of the World felt they could leave their morals and their respect of ethics at the door when they clocked in each morning. The next front page was all that mattered, no matter how it was obtained.
37. However, most of the journalists on the paper were decent people trapped in a whirlpool of aggressive thirst for sensational stories at any cost. Some, I believe, were used as scapegoats by the executives who hoped to use them as a firewall to protect their own skins. These were decent writers being bullied into using any means necessary to get information.
38. I feel that for many years some newspapers have been on course for destruction. Editors were handed far too much power and their egos were allowed to run wild. Some that I worked for often became pampered peacocks who only ever wanted to hear the word 'yes' and would shout and scream if they heard anything else.
39. An example was when one Editor I worked for sent his chauffeur 50 miles back to his home to pick up a bow tie he had left behind. No doubt the power and lucrative lifestyle that gives them front row seats and free holidays helped to corrupt them - so that some Editors totally lost sight of reality.
40. Consequently, even if they knew a story had come from illegal sources I feel sure they would allow it to run. They would never feel the blame or consequences of the decision would ever end up on their own doorstep.
41. Within the confines of newspaper buildings, editors and executives are hardly ever scrutinised over their conduct. On the rare occasions questions are asked, editors can quickly and easily name a scapegoat - usually a reporter - to take the flak.
42. The behaviour of editors for many years has been untamed and grossly off course in terms of conduct required for such a highly regarded position.
43. I believe this opinion would be echoed by many reporters and writers currently working in Fleet Street if they did not fear losing their jobs.
44. Although feeling genuine sadness at the loss of jobs for what was a majority of decent journalists, I would like to think that the closure of the News of the World could be the first step toward bringing British journalism back to the level of honesty and respect that the industry once deserved.

45. The blame for the cloud of disgrace that has descended upon our great newspaper industry is the fault of the sickeningly arrogant executives of News International. They should never be allowed to forget the shame of allowing a once great title to fall into such moral decay.
46. Better, braver men and women in the high places might have chosen to clean up the News of the World, to honour rather than harass the hard working, honest staff into using underhand methods of gathering information. Their aim could and should have been the restoration of the paper's reputation instead of allowing it to slither into the gutter and die.
47. And the closure of one of the world's oldest national newspapers was, in my view, is born of the collective responsibility of a culture of neglect at executive level to look at themselves from the public's perspective. Of course the closure was their last, cynical attempt to save their own skins and in doing so, put many innocents out of work.
48. Ironically for me, some of those executives, who currently feel they are being made scapegoats and being unjustly pilloried, were the very same people who were judged by my Tribunal to have bullied me out of work.
49. However, I sincerely hope that this dark chapter in the newspaper industry's history does not succeed in permanently blighting a profession that once had world renown for its high principles of journalistic practice.

THE CONTENTS OF THIS STATEMENT ARE TRUE
AND ACCURATE TO THE BEST OF MY BELIEF
AND KNOWLEDGE.

SIGNED



DATE 12/12/11